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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000140

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Next round of talks in Europe, as status of LTTE senior negotiator's health sparks concerns

Refs: (A) Oslo-Colombo 01/23/03 e-mail

- (B) Colombo-SA/INS 01/23/03 e-mail
- (C) Colombo 120, and previous

(U) Classified by Charge d'Affaires Lewis Amselem.
Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Norway has announced that the next round of GSL-LTTE talks will take place in Europe, February 7-8, not Thailand. The exact venue has not yet been formally set, but Berlin looks a strong bet. The switch was necessitated by the health condition of LTTE negotiator Balasingham, who lives in London, and wants the talks to be nearby. The GoN also confirmed that the February talks will focus on human rights and humanitarian issues. Given Balasingham's key role in the peace process, the status of his health is sparking increased concerns. END SUMMARY.

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Next Stop Europe
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2. (SBU) The Norwegian Embassy in Colombo sent out a press release on January 23 officially announcing that the fifth round of Sri Lankan government - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) talks will take place in Europe and not in Thailand as previously planned. (Note: This shift was foreshadowed in Ref C.) The dates of the talks will be February 7-8, a timeframe truncated from the original February 7-10 dates. (Note: The Norwegian government's press release was passed to SA/INS in Ref B.)

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Berlin Seems Likely Venue
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3. (C) The exact venue of the talks has not yet been formally set. According to contacts in the GSL and the Norwegian Embassy, possible choices for the next location include Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, and Norway, where the third round of talks took place in early December 2002. Late January 24, Mission was told by Norwegian Embassy poloff Tomas Stangeland that the talks would probably be held in Berlin at the Norwegian Embassy there. The Berlin venue has not yet been officially announced, Stangeland said, but it will probably be set soon.

4. (SBU) As noted in Refs A and C, the UK is also a possibility, as it is where LTTE senior negotiator Anton Balasingham lives (his health condition precipitated the change in venue -- see below). Given the UK's legal proscription of the LTTE, however, UK visas for Sri Lanka-based LTTE delegation members might be difficult to obtain. (Note: While not part of the official rounds of talks, senior GSL Minister Milinda Moragoda held a highly-publicized Norwegian-facilitated meeting with Balasingham in London in July 2002.)

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LTTE requests Change
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5. (C) Although the GoN press release did not specifically say it, contacts confirm that Balasingham's health was the key factor in the change of venue and dates. (Note: Balasingham has a serious kidney problem that demands constant medical care, including dialysis.) Stangeland of the Norwegian Embassy told us that Balasingham himself requested the changes about ten days ago. Confirming information in Ref A, Stangeland said Balasingham's health had not seriously deteriorated, but that he was very tired from the long plane flights to-and-from Asia. By having truncated talks at a European venue, he hoped to rest up for future trips, including to the LTTE-controlled Wanni region to meet with Tiger leaders ahead of the March round of talks in Japan.

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Focus of February Talks

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16. (C) The GoN press release also confirmed that the February talks will focus on human rights and humanitarian issues. GSL and Norwegian contacts have told us that the exact agenda regarding these topics had not yet been developed. Ian Martin, a former high-ranking member of Amnesty International, will serve as coordinator for the discussions on human rights issues, which will focus on LTTE actions, including its forcible recruitment of children (see Ref C). We have also been told by GSL contacts that the two sides may work to ensure that the February talks steer away from controversial topics such as the security zones in Jaffna, so as to make the discussions less onerous on Balasingham.

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COMMENT

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17. (C) The Norwegians seem to be trying their best to assure one-and-all that Balasingham's long-standing health problems are not worsening and that he is only tired. That may well be the case, but concerns are increasing that Balasingham's tiredness is part-and-parcel of a seriously deteriorating renal condition -- and that he may be on his way toward being incapacitated. Given the secrecy of the Tigers, Mission, unfortunately, has little way to confirm such a dire prognosis. That said, if Balasingham is somehow sidelined, it raises real question marks about the future of the peace process. Balasingham is close to LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran and also has extensive international exposure, qualities that few others in the LTTE have (no close matches come to mind, in fact). Given the potential stakes, the GSL is clearly worried about the issue. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.
AMSELEM